Battlemind Training

Transitioning from Combat to Home

Training Timeframe: At re-deployment

The Combat Veteran's Paradox

After returning from the war-zone, combat vets may feel a little edgy and pissed off…
but they are usually happy to be back home.

The War-Zone Environment

- Physically harsh, mentally demanding, dangerous, no privacy, no alcohol, no family/civilian friends, chaos, destruction and death, yet…

Thoughts of Returning to the War

Many Soldiers report a desire to return to combat:

- "Unfinished business"
  - Mission incomplete, job wasn't finished
- "Be all that you can be"
  - Doing the job you're trained to do
- "There is more control"
  - Life is "simpler" and focused in the war-zone
- "Home may have changed"
  - Transitioning home is difficult

The Transitioning Warrior

From “War zone” to “Home zone”

- **Battlemind** is the Soldier’s inner strength to face fear and adversity in combat with courage.

- Combat skills and battle mindset sustained your survival in the *war-zone*…

- But Battlemind may be “hazardous” to your social & behavioral health in the *home zone*…

Successful Transitions

- Every Soldier will transition home in their own way.
- The key to a successful transition home is to adapt your combat skills so that you are just as effective at home as you were in combat.
- Build on your proven strengths.

Combat Skills You All Possess

- Battlemind skills helped you survive in combat, but may cause you problems if not adapted when you get home.

Buddies (cohesion) **vs.** Withdrawal
Accountability **vs.** Controlling
Targeted Aggression **vs.** Inappropriate Aggression
Tactical Awareness **vs.** Hypervigilance
Lethally Armed **vs.** "Locked and Loaded" at Home
Emotional Control **vs.** Anger/Detachment
Mission Operational Security (OPSEC) **vs.** Secretiveness
Individual Responsibility **vs.** Guilt
Non-Defensive (combat) Driving **vs.** Aggressive Driving
Discipline and Ordering **vs.** Conflict

Buddies (Cohesion) vs. Withdrawal

B A T T L E M I N D

In Combat: No one understands your experience except your buddies who were there with you. Your life depended on your trust in your buddies.

At Home: May prefer to be with battle buddies rather than with spouse, family, or other friends. Assume only those who were there with you in combat understand or are interested. May avoid speaking about yourself to friends and family.

Buddies (Cohesion) vs. Withdrawal

B A T T L E M I N D

B Transitioning the Combat Skill

Cohesion: *Combat results in bonds with fellow Soldiers that will last a lifetime; back home, your friends and family have changed, re-establishing these bonds takes time and work.*

Action: Renew relationships at home. Spend individual time with each of your loved ones; balance time spent with buddies and family. Provide and accept support from them.

Accountability vs. Controlling

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In Combat: Maintaining control of weapon, and gear is necessary for survival. All your personal stuff is important to you.

At Home: Become angry when someone moves or messes with your stuff, even if insignificant. Nobody cares about doing things right except for you.

Accountability vs. Controlling

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Transitioning the Combat Skill

Accountability: *Back home, the small details are no longer important; family decisions and personal space are best shared.*

Action: Distinguish between what is and isn't important. Relinquishing control at home does not place you at risk. Don't be afraid to apologize when you overreact. Apologizing, especially to your spouse or significant other, is not a sign of weakness.

Targeted vs. Inappropriate Aggression

B A **T** T L E M I N D

In Combat: Soldiers make split second decisions that are lethal in a highly ambiguous environment. Kill or be killed. Anger keeps you pumped up, alert, awake, and alive.

At Home: Hostility towards others. Inappropriate anger, assault, spouse abuse. Snapping at buddies or NCOs. Overreactions to minor insults.

Targeted vs. Inappropriate Aggression

B A **T** T L E M I N D

Transitioning the Combat Skill

Targeted Aggression: "Combat anger" involves appropriate responses to the actual threat level to ensure safety.

Action: Assess whether there is a real threat to your safety. Think before you act. Wait before you respond (count to 10). Walk away. Talk to someone – get an azimuth check.

Tactical Awareness vs. Hypervigilance

B A T **T** L E M I N D

In Combat: Survival depends on being aware at all times of your surroundings and reacting immediately to sudden changes, such as sniper fire or mortar attacks.

At Home: You may feel keyed up or anxious in large groups of people or in situations where you feel confined. Being easily startled, especially when you hear loud bangs or noises. Having difficulty sleeping or having nightmares.

Tactical Awareness vs. Hypervigilance

B A T **T** L E M I N D

Transitioning the Combat Skill

Tactical Awareness: *Combat requires alertness and sustained attention; back home it takes time to learn to relax.*

Action: Monitor for revved-up reactions to minor events. Engage in regular exercise. Don't drink alcohol or take illegal drugs to fall asleep.

Lethally Armed vs. "Locked and Loaded" at Home

B A T T **L** E M I N D

In Combat: Carrying your weapon at all times was mandatory and an absolutely life or death necessity.

At Home: Need to have weapons on you, in your home and/or car at all times, believing that you and your loved ones are not safe without them.

Lethally Armed vs. "Locked and Loaded" at Home

B A T T **L** E M I N D

Transitioning the Combat Skill

Armed: In the combat zone you developed and followed strict rules for weapons safety, and when to fire your weapon.

Action: Resist the desire to have a weapon "locked and loaded." Follow all laws and safety precautions regarding weapons. Never drive with a loaded weapon. Never use a weapon to threaten or intimidate loved ones.

Emotional Control vs. Anger/Detachment

B A T T L E M I N D

In Combat: Controlling your emotions during combat is critical for mission success. This control quickly became second nature.

At Home: Failing to display emotions, or only showing anger, around family and friends will hurt your relationships. You may be seen as detached or uncaring.

Emotional Control vs. Anger/Detachment

B A T T L E M I N D

Transitioning the Combat Skill

Emotional Control: Involves both holding in and expressing feelings.

Action: Showing emotions is important for sustaining personal relationships. Displaying emotions is not unmilitary and doesn't mean you are weak.

Mission OPSEC vs. Secretiveness

BATTLEMIND

In Combat: Talk about mission only with those who need to know. Can only talk about combat experiences and missions with unit members or those who have "been there---done that."

At Home: Soldiers may avoid sharing <u>any</u> of their deployment experiences with spouse or significant other. You don't tell your spouse where you're going or when you'll get back (and get suspicious when they ask)

Mission OPSEC vs. Secretiveness

BATTLEMIND

Transitioning the Combat Skill

OPSEC: Provide information to those who need to know. Requires trusting your fellow Soldiers. The "need to know" now includes friends and family.

Action: Realize that your family has a need to know something about your experiences while deployed. Tell your story, but in the way you want to tell it. Share with your significant other what you're doing, day to day. Be proud of your service.

Individual Responsibility vs. Guilt

BATTLEMIND

In Combat: Your responsibility in combat is to survive and to do your best to keep your buddies alive.

At Home: You may feel you have failed your buddies if they were killed or seriously injured. You may be bothered by memories of those wounded or killed.

Individual Responsibility vs. Guilt

BATTLEMIND

Transitioning the Combat Skill

Responsibility: In the “heat of battle,” Soldiers must act—they must make life and death decisions. Later, it’s learning from these decisions…without second guessing.

Action: Recognize that there are human limits to preventing death and injuries. Don’t allow your survival guilt to destroy you. Your buddy would want you to drive on.

Non-Defensive (Combat) vs. Aggressive Driving

BATTLEMIND

In Combat: Unpredictable, fast, rapid lane changes, keeping other vehicles at a distance, straddling the middle line, designed to avoid IEDs and VBIEDs.

At Home: Aggressive driving leads to speeding tickets, accidents, fatalities.

Non-Defensive (Combat) vs. Aggressive Driving

B A T T L E M I **N** D

Transitioning the Combat Skill

Combat Driving: In combat, driving fast is necessary to avoid danger; back home, driving fast 'feels right,' but is dangerous.

Action: Shift from offensive driving to defensive driving. Control your anger. Obey traffic laws. Use turn signals. Slow down.

Discipline & Ordering vs. Conflict

BATTLEMIND

In Combat: Survival depends on discipline and obeying orders. Following orders kept you and those around you safe and in control.

At Home: Inflexible interactions (ordering and demanding behaviors) with your spouse, children, and friends often leads to conflict.

Discipline & Ordering vs. Conflict

BATTLEMIND

Transitioning the Combat Skill

Discipline & Ordering: Giving and following orders involves a clear chain of command, which does not exist within families.

Action: Acknowledge that friends and family members have been successful while you have been gone and may have developed new ways of doing things. Always be prepared to negotiate. A family is not a military unit.

The Alcohol Transition

Restricted Alcohol vs. Available Alcohol

In Combat: In the combat theatre, alcohol use was limited.

At Home: Alcohol is now plentiful.

Action: Pace yourself. Don't drink and drive. Don't drink to calm down or if you are feeling depressed. Don't drink if you're having trouble sleeping; it actually makes the sleep worse! Don't encourage each other to get drunk. Look out for each other.

Battlemind Injuries

Battlemind injuries can occur to any Soldier when combat skills are not adapted to the home.

Battlemind Symptoms

- Strong memories, nightmares or unpleasant thoughts after combat
- Feeling numb, detached, or avoiding things that remind you of the war-zone
- Being revved up: trouble sleeping, irritable and angry, easily startled

Impact of Battlemind Injuries

- These symptoms are common following combat; they usually decrease after returning home.
- For some, these common combat symptoms persist.
- These symptoms may interfere with job performance, relationships, and enjoying life.
- The earlier Soldiers seek help, the quicker they will feel better.
- Early treatment protects careers and relationships.

Cues to Seek Professional Help

- Readjustment issues are intense and/or last more than a few months
- Suicidal or Homicidal thinking, intent, or actions
- Excessive substance use
- Performance problems at work or at home
- Feeling distant or cut-off from spouse, thinking or talking about separation/divorce
- Conflict, arguing and hostility
- Feeling low, hopeless, or not able to enjoy life
- Spouse, supervisor or buddy suggests you need help

Resources for Getting Help

- Unit
  - Chaplain / Leadership / Buddy
- Post
  - Troop Medical Clinic
  - Mental/Behavioral Health Services
- Other
  - Off-post Mental Health professional
  - Army One Source / Military One Source (1-800-342-9647)
  - Veterans Affairs (VA)

Summary

BATTLEMIND

- **Battlemind** is the Soldier's inner strength to face fear and adversity in combat with courage.

- Getting help for a Battlemind injury is NOT a sign of weakness.

- It takes courage to ask for help and it takes leadership to help a fellow Soldier get help.

WELCOME HOME!

Please send comments and suggestions for improving this brief to LTC Carl A. Castro (301-319-9174), carl.castro@us.army.mil. Thanks to COL Charles Hoge and the WRAIR Land Combat Study Team for their assistance in the development and validation of this training material, and the VA Puget Sound Deployment Health Clinic for review.